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This is the last in a series of pilot Outreach '79 seminars we have held in co-sponsorship with three historically black institutions, Southern, Tennessee State, and Prairie View A&T.

We have been heartened by the reception and the participation of persons who have attended previous presentations.

"The people--all of the people regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, sex--have a right to know about the federally assisted and direct assistance programs and to participate in them on an equal basis."

An examination of participants in the 274 programs administered by the agriculture department's 19 agencies discloses a wide gap in participation by minority groups.

When we sought to find out the reason for the discrepancy we were told that the minorities just don't apply.

As I travel about the nation, I have learned that minorities are unaware of the agriculture department programs.

When I confront USDA program directors with the second explanation, I learned that the department has been using the "usual approaches" to inform the public about its programs.

We know that the usual approaches are not necessarily effective when dealing with minorities who have been traditionally "left out," and have been long-time victims of discrimination.

Many blacks complain that after applying for federal assistance through various programs, they learn their applications have been lost, or have been buried under a pile of paperwork.

Remarks by Joan S. Wallace, Assistant Secretary for Administration, before the Outreach Seminar '79, North Carolina A&T University, Greensboro, North Carolina, September 26, 1979

When a person has suffered years of humiliation, evasion, hedging, and excuses, the victim is hesitant to invite added indignity.

So when Secretary Bob Bergland, says he is committed to restoring the agriculture department to its original status as the "people's department," as it was known when established by Abraham Lincoln in 1862, blacks and other minorities tend to listen with a suspicious ear.

Secretary Bergland has shown by example that the department will involve all people. His executive staff of assistant secretaries includes two women, a black, and a Hispanic--a first for the department.

The relations of blacks to agriculture, in spite of their contributions, have not been glowing. To be sure, black scientists, researchers, and inventors--such as Dr. George Washington Carver and Percy Julian--were involved in discoveries that have meant much to agriculture.

Students of history are aware that the promise of "40 acres and a mule" for freed slaves after the Civil War went unfulfilled.

We were also aware that in 1890, land grant institutions were established for blacks as "separate but equal facilities." Once established, the 1890, or historically black colleges, were separate but seldom equal.

With the Supreme Court decision of May 1954, we saw a new educational development. The Warren court said that "separate cannot be equal," and ordered the desegregation of the educational institutions "with all deliberate speed."

During the 24 intervening years since that decision, we find certain persons interpreting the court's edict to mean that only predominantly white institutions should survive, and the 1890 and other historically black institutions should be eliminated under the "guide of desegregation."

So it becomes a question of whither shall we go?

Last January, President Carter issued a memorandum to all federal agencies directing officials to assist black colleges and universities. President Carter made it clear that the "continuing importance of historically black colleges and universities cannot be overestimated. This administration is committed to enhancing their strength and prosperity."

In May of last year, Secretary Bergland told a group of black leaders that there were persons of influence who doubted "the wisdom of the Department of Agriculture to have an outreach program," to go and reach out, to bring people in and seek their advice and counsel.

"We have created our own office of citizen participation so that persons who are not necessarily engaged in the manufacture of chemicals, or the feeding of livestock, have some means by which their voices can be heard in our decisionmaking process," the secretary said.

During the 22 months that I have been at the department, I have seen some progressive changes. And, if what some of the veteran employees tell me is correct, the changes are some that many never thought possible.

Implementing a policy change in a department of more than 80,000 employees in 19 agencies administering 274 programs cannot be accomplished by waving a magic wand.

Since 90 percent of the department employees are scattered in 17,000 offices throughout the world, instant communication--as desirable as it might be--is improbable.

To administer a department that deals with America's largest industry--an industry larger than General Motors and Ford combined, employing more people than Xerox, and larger than IBM in total value--is understandably complicated.

The Department of Agriculture serves all Americans daily.

It works to improve and maintain farm income and to develop and expand markets abroad for agricultural products. The department helps to curb and to cure poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. It works to enhance the environment and to maintain our production capacity by helping landowners protect the soil, water, forests, and other natural resources. Rural development, credit, and conservation programs are key resources for carrying out national growth policies. Its research findings directly or indirectly benefit all Americans. The department, through inspection and grading services, safeguards and assures standards of quality in the daily food supply.

I could go on describing programs of the agriculture department, but I believe you have an idea of the scope of its vital mission.

To the students assembled here, I urge you to look into career possibilities in agriculture-related professional occupations.

The department's cooperative education program offers continuing education to students. It provides for periods of study-related, paid jobs for students working towards an associate, bachelor, master, or doctorate degrees. Students can be converted into career-conditional appointments in the agency where they worked.

About 800 students from 114 different colleges and universities were employed in the cooperative program last year. In addition, the department also has three faculty fellowship programs. Assignments range from 6 weeks to a year.

In 1977, of the 98,519 students studying agriculture in all land grant colleges--both the 1862 and 1890 institutions--less than 2,000 were black. Blacks enrolled at the predominantly white institutions numbered about 5 percent.

It appears that unless there is greater interest among black youth of the opportunities in agriculture, the ongoing effort to open doors in this field will be frustrated by the lack of trained black professionals.

There are job markets for graduates with agriculture degrees. In addition to job opportunities in the private sector, the agriculture department has several agencies that are recruiting black employees.

We realize that the millenium has not arrived in our equal opportunity efforts. While I am the first to admit that not enough has been done, I feel our efforts have not been in vain.

Since we began this venture at Southern University last March, I have seen many interesting changes at the agriculture department.

The first, and most immediate, is the family spirit that has been generated by the group making the presentations.

Previously, because of the autonomy of agriculture department agencies, it was not uncommon to find an employee of Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service view an employee of the Food and Nutrition Service as a stranger. Yet, both are integral parts of the department's overall mission.

Not only are guests at these seminars becoming more informed about the department, but employees of various agencies are finding a spirit of team membership replacing competitiveness. A spirit is being generated by an understanding of each other's role in the agriculture department, and how their agencies mesh into serving the agricultural community.

The optimism stems from a number of heartening developments within the department.

On October 18, for example, I will speak to citizens of South Guthrie, Tennessee, where agriculture department and other federal funds have been used to rehabilitate a community that was damaged by a flood.

A flood prevention project, new, low-cost housing, a waste disposal and water system, improved streets, and a renovated community center will be dedicated.

The citizens of South Guthrie are proud of the improvement that has been made possible by the cooperation of several agencies within Agriculture and other departments of the federal government.

An official of the Soil Conservation Service commented, "What has been accomplished in the community of South Guthrie reflects the spirit of the Outreach '79 seminar that was held in Nashville with the cooperation of the Tennessee State University."

The participants you have heard, and will hear from on various panels during this conference, come not only from Washington where policy is made, but also from state and local communities where policy is implemented.

The doors of opportunity for all to take advantage of the programs offered by the agriculture department are open.

Heed the advice of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, an educator, politician, and philosopher: "When the doors of opportunity open, be ready to put your foot in."

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